

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

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1. Apparatus for verifying and sorting or shuffling sets of playing cards comprising:

A. control means;

B. input means for receiving playing cards into the apparatus;

C. identification means for reading indicia on the playing cards;

D. buffer means having a plurality of slots for temporarily holding cards;

E. directing means for directing cards from into slots in the buffer means;

F. transporting means for moving cards from the input means to and through the identification means;

G. stacking means;

H. ejecting means for ejecting cards from the slots in the buffer means into the stacking means; the apparatus adapted to verify that a true set of cards has been received in the input means and to deliver a true set of cards at the stacking means in either a random order or a sorted order.

2. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the identification means comprises a reader adapted to read identifying information on the face of the cards.

3. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the stacking means is an elevator driven by a motor controlled by the control means to move between a first position where cards ejected from the buffer means are received to a second position where a stack of the ejected cards can be retrieved by a human operator or dealer.

4. Apparatus according to claim 3 wherein the control means is adapted to cause the elevator to move to the second position only when a true set or deck is identified.

5. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the ejecting means comprises a pusher adapted to push a card from a selected slot sideways onto or into the stacking means.

6. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the control means is a computer processor or microprocessor programmed to receive information from the identification means, determine the identity of each card based on the received information, compare the identity of each card to a list of cards in a true set, generate an order of cards in the true set, control the alignment of slots in the buffer means with the directing means so that cards will be received or ejected from the slots in the order generated by the control means, said generated order being either a pseudo-random order, a random order or a sorted order.

7. Apparatus according to claim 6 further including visual and/or audible signal means and wherein said control means is also adapted to direct a visual or audible signal upon identification of a card which does not belong to a true set or deck, and/or upon determination that a card is missing from a true set or deck after all of the cards received in the input means have been identified.

8. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the buffer means is a wheel or elevator operated by a motor controlled by the control means.

9. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein said means for reading indicia is selected from the group consisting of a bar code reader, optical scanner, reader of magnetic indicia, or reader of holograms.

10. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein said set consists of one or more blackjack decks, Pan-9 decks, Caribbean stud decks, California blackjack decks, or super-pan-9 decks

11. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the transporting means comprises one or more motor-driven friction rollers and a conveyer.

12. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the control means comprises a 68HC16 or X86 microprocessor.

13. Apparatus according to claim 8 further including a mechanical and/or electrical locking means adapted to signal its locked or unlocked status to the control means, the control means adapted to cause the elevator to remain in the first position when the locking means is in a locked status.

14. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the said control means is connected to a network controller and is adapted to send and receive information to and from the network controller regarding locked/unlocked status and/or number of cards or sets of cards determined to be complete or incomplete sets.

15. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the buffer means is a sorting wheel and the directing means comprises a motor adapted to rotate the sorting wheel to align a slot selected by the control means with the transporting means so that a card may be directed into the selected slot.

16. Apparatus according to claim 1 further including means to determine the physical integrity of cards, the physical integrity comprising one or more factors selected from bent, torn, nicked, and marked, and optionally including means to physically eject any card determined to lack the physical integrity.

17. Apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the true set is delivered at the stacking means in a sorted order which is the same order and consists of the same cards as found in new fresh decks.

18. Apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the true set is delivered at the stacking means is adapted to generate a new random order each time a set of cards is introduced to the control means, the set comprising from 1 to 10 decks.

19. Apparatus according to claim 1 adapted to print or direct a printer to print verification data.

20. Process of verifying sets of playing cards comprising:

A. providing an apparatus according to claim 1;

B. feeding to the input means one or more cards either after they have been played in a game or from an unrandomized or unverified set;

C. manually retrieving a verified true set of cards from the stacking means.

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21. Process of playing in a casino setting or simulated casino setting a card game comprising providing an apparatus according to claim 1, feeding unverified sets of playing cards to the input means, and recovering verified true sets of cards from the stacking means.

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22. Process according to claim 21 further including providing playing cards which are specially coded with either bar coding or hologram indicia indicating the value and suit of each playing card.